

Some Things Never Change

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Spongebob Squarepants. The cartoon that will never end. A world where time stands still. But what if it didn't?

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For all you snowflake fanboys, this one-shot is NOT me trying to make some big statement or attack anyone. It's just a simple Humor/Parody one-shot fic poking fun at a show that has long since worn out its welcome.

Another day, another nickel. Neptune, why did he still quote that stupid quip he first made....what? Fourteen, fifteen years ago? Maybe it was because his imbecilic coworker drilled it into his brain ages ago by never shutting up about it? Or maybe it was because it perfectly summed up his miserable dead-end job? The same dead-end job he had been stuck with for nearly 40 years.

Squidward wondered how his life, after all this time, as well as everyone he knew and just Bikini Bottom as a whole remained so... stagnant? So samey? So set in stone. Like an oversaturated sitcom way past its prime repeating the same tried and true formula over and over again. That analogy could aptly describe his daily schedule. It really could. Work at the Krusty Krab and put up with his skinflint boss and moronic coworker, then go back home and put up with his moronic neighbor and his somehow even more moronic deadbeat of a friend.

Sometimes he tried to advance his career as an artist or musician or dancer, and would inevitably fail at it. Miserably. Very miserably. And oftentimes that snob Squilliam Fancyson would conveniently be there to rub it in his face. That was his life, a very strict formula seemingly fine-tuned to make poor Squidward Tentacles as miserable as possible.

How was it possible that the last significant change in his life (one for the worse) was that dreadful day when the bane of his existence at Conch Street landed a job at the Krusty Krab? Squidward had to remind himself how that had in fact been a big change, as it

happened so long ago. If there used to be one *perk* to working as the Krusty Krab's cashier, it was getting away from Spongebob. Hard to imagine that the Krusty Krab once provided him with some sort of *sanctuary*.

But after all this time, no fish in Bikini Bottom could imagine the Krusty Krab without the perpetually happy square-shaped fry cook that served them their artery-clogging junk food. Or the cynical cashier that couldn't care less about offering those greedy barnacle heads good customer service.

This was his life, the same as it was 20 years ago. Literally. Maybe Squidward's age was just taking a toll on his memory, but whenever he would reminiscence about his life around the time just after Spongebob became employed at the Krusty Krab, he could not name one semi-significant difference to his daily routine as it was back then compared to how it is now.

Slouching, Squidward opened the door to the Krusty Krab, making his trademark suction cup noises as he slowly staggered towards the cash register and sat at his post. Coming here used to fill him with agonizing dread and misery, but at this point in his life, Squidward didn't really feel that anymore. He just felt numb. Hollow. Like a lifeless spirit wandering this world with no goal or purpose but unable to leave it. He was just going through the motions now. The old octopus braced himself. Three.....two....one.

"Good morning, Squidnator!" Predictably, Spongebob popped up from the kitchen window, greeting his "friend" in his usual loud, bombastic tone. The concept of an indoor voice was foreign to the sponge. You'd think the volume of it would have made Squidward cringe, or at least have some kind of a reaction. But he had none. He was so used to this it meant nothing to him. Or maybe his hearing was just starting to fail him.

"Good morning, Spongebob...." Squidward muttered. Might as well acknowledge him, because if he didn't, Spongebob would just pester

him until he got a response. The yellow idiot could rarely take a hint, or a million of them.

"So, how did you audition for this year's Dance-A-Thon go?"
Spongebob asked, always in the mood for idle chitchat.

"*Oh, joy. He remembered it .*" Squidward tensed up with annoyance.

After receiving no answer, and noticing Squidward's gloom demeanor, well, *gloomier* than usual, Spongebob's perky smile slowly dropped.

"Oh, didn't make again it, huh?" Squidward rolled his eyes. He was amazed the sponge had enough sense to figure out the obvious.

"Nope." He droned, still not facing Spongebob. He didn't care to elaborate on it, but Spongebob would probably force him anyway.

"Ah, cheer up, Squid." Spongebob quickly perked up and gave Squidward a playfully punch to the arm. "I'm sure next year's audition will go better."

Squidward still barely reacted. "You said the same thing about my last 12 auditions and the next one *didn't* go better."

"Well, you know what they say; 13 is the charm!"

"That's a nice sentiment, Spongebob. But I'm afraid this time it was different." Squidward replied humorlessly.

"What do you mean?" Spongebob asked.

"This might come as a shock to you, but the reason why my audition failed wasn't because the judges were tasteless hacks who couldn't recognize talent if it was dancing right in front of them, but because....." Squidward paused as he placed his tentacles on his hips and bent back.

Both he and Spongebob winced as the former's back emitted a sickening crunch.

Trying to ignore the pain, Squidward muttered "....because I dislocated my back and botched my act." He hissed as he continued massaging it.

"And that's when I had to face the unfortunate truth, Spongebob. I can no longer do interpretative dancing, dancing is meant for young people with athletic prowess and flexible bodies, not for a decrepit old octopus like me. Yesterday I hung up my leotard and sweatband."

Spongebob gasped overdramatically. "Squidward! You get that nonsense out of your head right now! That's quitter talk!" he lectured his coworker. "You are never too old to do the things you love!"

"Like still indulging in juvenile activities like jellyfishing or idolizing superheroes?" Squidward deadpanned.

"Exactly. I love jellyfishing. And Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy will always be my idols." Spongebob then sighed sadly. "Too bad they had to move away from Shady Sholes and the caretakers didn't write down their new address."

Squidward got a little uncomfortable listening to this. Was Spongebob still unaware that Mermaid Man had passed away from old age eight years ago and Barnacle Boy followed suit not long after? Did the caretakers at Shady Sholes pity the fool so much they couldn't bring themselves to tell him the awful truth?

He finally glanced at the sponge, carrying an unamused look. "So you're telling me that simple passion can overcome everything, even your own physical deterioration that comes with age?" He humored him, mainly because he had nothing better to do.

"Of course I do."

"Even if you need to be physically fit in order to perform said passion?"

"Mhmhm!" Spongebob nodded with utter conviction.

"Even if you've been met with failure for 20 whole years?"

"Of course, you should never give up, Squid? Why I've been trying to get my boating license for years-"

"Oh, yes, 24 years if I'm correct?" Squidward deadpanned, which was utterly lost on Spongebob.

"Yes, and I'm still trying. I'm telling you, Squidward, I can feel it! Next time, I will get my boating license, I just know it."

"I'm frankly surprised you're still allowed at boating school after you nearly *killed* Mrs. Puff and ruptured her inflation sack." Squidward muttered to himself incredulously.

He wondered why the pufferfish hadn't filed a restraining order against the yellow menace by now? Then again, if her luck was anything like his, she might have tried that only for Patrick to somehow end up as one of her students, making her view Spongebob as *slightly* less excruciating.

"Don't exaggerate, Squidward. It was just an accident and she got better." Spongebob shrugged. "Besides, she wasn't that upset about it. She even let me participate in the Demolition Derby for extra credit!"

Groaning, Squidward turned around and slumped into his seat. This was just unbelievable.

"Spongebob..." he started exasperatedly "...your blind naiveté was *mildly* charming when you first started working here, but this is getting ridiculous."

He wasn't kidding. While Squidward was never fond of the little guy, in the past he was, believe it or not, more lenient on Spongebob's rampant idiocy. Being a mature adult, some part of Squidward always told him that Spongebob was just young and ignorant. He would learn and mature over time. At least that's what he told himself back in 2005. Now, there was no doubt. The sea sponge was just delusional, no two ways about it. A child stuck in a grown man's body, entirely ignorant to the world around him.

"How is that? Positive thinking always helps!"

Indeed he was. Squidward still couldn't fathom how 20 years of working at this deprived, rundown, so-called eating establishment hadn't killed Spongebob's child-like naiveté and turned him into the same cynical, bitter mess that his coworker was? At this point, he and Spongebob should have been able to relate to each other, by sharing their mutual misery working at this dump, but no. Spongebob was still the eager, overzealous newb he was when he first started working here. Just what was wrong in the sponge's head that prohibited him from growing and learning with age?

"Are you serious, Spongebob? Or are you trying to pull my tentacle?" Squidward lamented. "For Neptune's sake, you're a 43-year-old sponge! Are you seriously insinuating that you honestly still think that mere "positive thinking" can magically overcome basic facts of life, like someone growing weak and tired with old age?"

"Oh, Squidward. Don't be silly." Spongebob waved his hand dismissively. "I don't think so, I know so. Need proof? Just look at our benevolent boss, Mr. Krabs. He's probably older than even the oldest building in Bikini Bottom and yet he's still as fit as a fiddle."

He did have a point, Squidward pondered. How did Old Man Krabs remain so strong and vigorous in his old age? The guy had been running the Krusty Krab long before Squidward even got his job as a cashier to make ends meet before his career as a musician/artist took off. Oh, how naïve he was back then. That was nearly 40 years

ago! How has the old crustacean not been sent on a one-way voyage to Davy Jones's locker yet?

If anything, if Krabs kicked the bucket, surely Squidward, his oldest and "most loyal" employee would inherit the restaurant? Who else could Krabs entrust to run this joint? Obviously not Spongebob, who was still being treated like a teen intern by the old miser, and certainly not his bratty and useless daughter, Pearl, who still lived with him, though Krabs did charge her rent, which forced her to look for jobs, which she could never hold on to for very long, because she preferred to slack off with her friends like she was still 16 years old.

If Squidward was the captain of this vessel, it would be far from a prestigious position, but at least then he could sit around in his office and not have to serve the obnoxious ingrates that frequented the Krusty Krab. And he could find some meager enjoyment docking Spongebob's pay. Of course, he would still have to work, despite his advanced age. Not like the Krusty Krab had retirement benefits.

"Which reminds me, Squid?" Spongebob shoved a calendar into Squidward's face, with a specific date encircled.

"What about it?" Squidward pushed the calendar away.

"Don't you see?" Spongebob pointed at the date again. "It's the day Mr. Krabs goes to the annual Fast Food Congress in New Kelp City!"

"Aye, ye got that right, lad!" Speak of the devil, their tightwad boss came out of his office, oddly enough dressed in hiker gear and carrying a large backpack.

"Eh, why do you need all of that stuff?" Squidward inquired.

"That's none o' yer concern. I don't pay ye t' ask questions, Mr. Squidward." Krabs retorted, rather defensively.

"You pay us? That's news to me." Squidward snarked in response.

"Aye, dustin' off that ole classic, are ye? 'n ye wonder why ye ne'er made it as a comedian." Krabs chuckled humorously.

"Oh, Mr. Krabs. You dropped something." Spongebob found a rolled-up map at the door of Krabs' office, and picked it up and brought it to his employer.

"Good lad, Spongebob. I can always count on ye." Krabs extended his claw to receive the map, but Spongebob's curiosity got the better of him and he took a peek.

"Say, why does it say "Fountain of Y-" a sweaty Krabs snatched the map away.

"Never mind that! I assume ye scallywags know I'll be away fer a least a day 'n I expect me galley t' be in tip-top shape upon me return."

"You can always count on us, Mr. Krabs!" Spongebob saluted him.

"Why do you need a map to New Kelp City?" Squidward inquired.

"Tis not a map, 'tis.....eh.....an ole fashion brochure, Mr. Squidward..." Krabs insisted and poked him in the chest. "...'n if I were ye, I'd be less concerned wit' wha' I be doin' but wit' runnin' me vessel! 'n I expect ye two to work as hard as usual. Runnin' th' Krusty Krab ain't an easy feat."

"You mean Spongebob cooking the overpriced gruel you call food and me serving it to the customers after taking their money? Oh, how ever will we do it without you, sir." Squidward deadpanned.

"You're right, Squidward. I always have to remind myself not to forget the pickles." Spongebob agreed.

"Enough sarcasm. I don't pay ye t' be sarcastic." Krabs reminded the octopus before heading off. "Well, got t' go. Remember, lads, any mishaps will be comin' out o' yer paychecks. See ye soon!"

"Aye, aye, sir." Squidward mock saluted him as Mr. Krabs left. Why did the old geezer still call them "lads"? He was just feeding into Spongebob's delusion by treating him like a child. Then again, if you were as old as Mr. Krabs, everyone else would look like a child by comparison.

"Oh, boy, Squidward! What an honor it is to be invited to the annual Fast Food Congress in New Kelp City!" Spongebob bounced with excitement. "You think one day one of us will be worthy to join him on that epic journey?"

"Considering Krabs's "fondness" for sharing, I doubt it." Squidward dripped with sarcasm. He was pretty sure Mr. Krabs was doing anything but attending a convention, but like the old crustacean said, it wasn't his job to ask questions.

Spongebob shot him two finger guns and headed back to the kitchen. "Well, those patties won't flip themselves, call me if you need me, *Mr. Tentacles*."

"I'll keep that in mind." Squidward grumbled. At least now he could enjoy a mandatory few moments of peace. Few customers came here at 7.20 in the morning. But as he tried to reach for one of his magazines, the door opened.

"Howdy, fellas!" Sandy walked in with a pet carrier in her right hand.

Squidward didn't care to respond as she came up to him, but Spongebob somersaulted out the window and landed in front of the Texan squirrel with a freshly made krabby patty on a silver plater.

"Good morning, Sandy." He greeted her. "How's my best friend, besides Patrick and the Squidmeister, doing? I'm happy to let you know that you're our first customer today—"

"Oh, no, Spongebob. That's mighty sweet awf ya, but ah done had breakfast." Sandy politely refused.

"Oh, then why did you come? Got lost on your way to your square dancing lessons?" Squidward snarked, making Sandy glower at him.

"No, ah jus' came by ta fetch this little crider back ta his rightful owner." She opened the pet carrier and Gary slithered out.

"Gary!" Spongebob was ecstatic and kneeled down to pet the snail. Gary seemed a little apprehensive as Spongebob petted his eyestalks and subsequently picked him up.

"Awww, did you enjoy your vacation at Uncle Blue's farm, Gare-bear?"

"He sawh did." Sandy chuckled awkwardly. "A change of scenery is guhd for a mollusk's health. Gettin' away from all thuh buzz an pollution."

"You're creative, I'll give you that." Squidward said monotonously.

"That's great, Sandy. But why didn't dad tell me that he was bringing Gary back home today?" Spongebob asked Sandy. "I would have picked him up in no time."

"Oh, well. 'im and ah both know you're a busy sponge, bein' Bikini Bottom's best fry cook." Sandy hastily replied. "Besides, it was no biggie doin' maah best bud a solid."

"Well, thanks so much, Sandy." Spongebob told her before looking at Squidward and saluting him. "Captain Tentacles, sir! May I ask for permission to return Gary back to our humble abode, sir!"

"Knock yourself out." Squidward shrugged. "Just don't take too long. You know I stink at making patties, and I can't fight off the ravenous mobs on my own."

As Spongebob left, Squidward shifted his scrutinizing gaze at Sandy.

"What?"

"So you still don't want to tell him?"

"We'll tell 'im when he's ready for it. No need t' rush things." Sandy placed her hands on her hips, not appreciating the former's tone.

"And when that's going to be?"

"When he's *ready* , Squidward. Ya don't wanna break his little heart now, do ya?"

"He wasn't a child when you first met him, Sandy. And he certainly isn't one now." Squidward threw his tentacles up. "I would think a middle-aged sponge would be emotionally mature enough to handle the topic of death. Honestly, it's ridiculous that we still have to pull the old switcheroo after all these years--"

"Hey, ya jus' mahnd yur own business. Ah know how thuh little square dude ticks beder than ya ever cared ta do, and ah don't wanna see 'im crushed."

"Fine..." Squidward gave up as he and Sandy glared at each other. "I won't tell a soul, but don't come asking me to bury him *again* because you're too squeamish."

Sandy rubbed her arm. "Actually, ah thihnk this one is a *her* ."

Squidward made a face. "Seriously? He's that clueless?"

"Whatever." With a huff, Sandy turned her back on him and was about to leave.

Noticing a silver stripe running along her bushy tail, Squidward snorted. "Might want to invest in better hair dye?"

Sandy looked at her tail and grew alert, clutching it and trying to hide it in embarrassment. "Ya 'aven't aged gracefully either, Prune Face!" she shot back defensively, her voice taking on a scratchier quality as she raised it.

Squidward didn't argue about that. He might have been vain, but he wasn't delusional about his own age. In hindsight though, perhaps it wasn't that surprising that Spongebob was still the manchild he is, when all of his so-called friends were continuously encouraging him and enabling him *not* to face reality and grow up.

"Oh, my bad, Sandy." Squidward feigned regret. "Never talk about a lady's age, or was it her weight?"

He jerked back as a fist nearly collided with his face. "Ya beder watch it, ya condescendin' coyote, if ya know what's good for ya!"

"Alright, fine. I'm sorry." Squidward held his tentacles up defensively. Sandy wasn't the youngest land lubber anymore, but that fiery temper of hers was still burning. Sandy turned around and stormed out of the restaurant, aware but unwilling to admit that the octopus made a valid point.

"Sheesh, women are touchy about their age." Squidward lamented and grabbed one of his magazines he hid below the register. Might as well enjoy a few moments of peace until the ever-dutiful Spongebob returned. His mind drifted back to that botched audition, and then to his conversation with Spongebob. If you've been failing at something for 20 years, maybe it was time to pack it in?

With a heavy sigh, Squidward mulled over his own words of wisdom. Why was he still bothering at this point? In two weeks, he would be "celebrating" his 60th birthday, and no doubt Spongebob and Patrick were already planning a surprise party that they would spring on him when and where he least expects it. It would probably involve waking up in bed with them so they could wish him a happy birthday. They would probably get Sandy, Mr. Krabs and whatever other Bikini Bottomite the cephalopod was semi-acquainted with to attend the party. He didn't know why they kept coming, none of them cared about him. They probably just did it to get Spongebob off their backs.

Squidward despised birthday parties. Not only because he had nothing in his life worth celebrating about, but those parties just

served as a cruel reminder of his advancing age. And now, even his performance at interpretive dancing was getting affected by it. Maybe he should just resign himself to his lot in life. Success was a young person's destiny. His window of opportunity had closed a long time ago, if it had ever been there to begin with. Why put up with all these backwater twits that would forever stand between him and success? These small-town roobs were just as simple-minded and uncultured today as they had been 20 years ago, nothing has changed. So why even bother?

Squidward had no intention of giving up on art and music though. Those things didn't require physical fitness. But maybe he should go back to only dabbling with them as a hobby? Those things had always brought him joy as hobbies, but whenever he tried to make a career out of them, it just resulted in a string of failures and utter misery. It just wasn't his destiny to be a famous artist or musician, his destiny was to be the lowly Krusty Krab cashier. It was depressing, but Squidward just couldn't deny reality anymore. Maybe he should try to find whatever meager enjoyment he could in the only thing he had left in his life, his hobbies. Art and music. The people in his life would remain pains in his backside until the day he would finally be relieved of everything by the sweet embrace of death. And that day was getting closer and closer. Given all the stress he has endured on a daily basis for decades, Squidward highly doubted that it would be old age that finally did him in. Might as well try to find some meager enjoyment while the going was still good.

If there was one thing he could be sure of at this point, it was the simple truth that nothing would happen to disrupt his daily schedule. It was unlikely that tomorrow held any surprises for him or any of his acquaintances. Here in Bikini Bottom, nothing ever changes.

So this is a not-so-subtle jab at a show that has refused to retire when it should have. An executive-mandated franchise zombie that used to appeal to both kids and adults, but nowadays most adults who talk about this show are likely kids that grew up

watching the classic Hillenburg era. And just to be clear, I don't hate every post-movie episode. Far from it. I enjoyed a good chunk of season 4 and there are some pretty good episodes from seasons 9B to 11. But it's hard not to argue that this show stopped being relevant ages ago, as is any show that was forced to go way past its expiration date, and whatever good episodes came after the first movie, they could never make up for all the mediocre and flat out bad episodes that came with them. And being a gag show with a heavy emphasis on "the status quo is god", Spongebob inevitably suffered franchise fatigue not long after it was uncancelled back in 2005. Even at its best, modern Spongebob is (as a whole) nothing but a shadow of its former glory.

This one-shot wasn't written with any specific agenda in mind, besides the fact that the cast of Spongebob has been stuck in limbo for 20 years now, forced to repeat the same shtick that once made them comedy icons, but has long since worn out its welcome. Here I played around with the idea that the characters of Spongebob were in fact subject to the passage of time, but the status quo from Season 1 remained to this day either because some characters had nowhere to move on to (like Squidward, due to his bad luck), or they refused to grow and change (like most of the other characters here). Hence they are effectively living in limbo, living an existence where nothing ever changes. Spongebob is still living in the past, acting like an overzealous newb fresh out of high school, Sandy willingly enables that by refusing to goad her friend into growing up and is touchy about her own age (women stereotype XD), and Mr. Krabs is perfectly content living like he always did, pinching pennies and scamming people out of their cash (and is likely immortal). Patrick didn't make an appearance, but he's easy to figure out; he's a lazy and unmotivated hedonist, so unsurprisingly he never tried to accomplish anything in 20 years XD